

reader feedback

Readers are invited to express themselves on any subject related to the infosystems industry, or to the use of infosystems.
Address: Letters Editor, INFOSYSTEMS, Hitchcock Building, Wheaton, IL 60187.

"Pride and Profit" hits the mark

Your June editorial was precisely on target!

John C. O'Mara
Executive Director
Computer Security Institute
Northboro, MA

More on superprogrammers

In the February 1976 issue, INFOSYSTEMS published Edward Yourdon's article, "How To Be A Superprogrammer." In the May issue my letter and Yourdon's reply to my letter were printed. In my letter I was critical of Yourdon's blueprint for becoming a superprogrammer and questioned the intent of the article; it wasn't clear to me whether or not the article was intended as satire. In his reply to my letter Yourdon made it clear that no satire was intended and took a patronizing attitude toward my objections, completely sidestepping the issues I raised. I found his article puzzling but I deemed his reply offensive.

Mr. Yourdon's defense of his article consists of coining terms rather than responding to issues. If I find the road he paves to superprogrammerdom fraught with perils, it is because I am confusing "superprogrammers" with "code bums." I'm not interested in labels—I'm interested in proper training. If Mr. Yourdon is claiming that "superprogrammers" and "code bums" both have the same modus operandi, his formula for becoming a superprogrammer is a hoax. I had never seen the term "code bums" before but Mr. Yourdon defines it for me as one who writes "spaghetti bowl" programs. Thank you, Mr. Yourdon, for the clarification.

In his reply, Mr. Yourdon goes on to say that his article was describing some of the characteristics of superprogrammers, or what IBM would call "chief programmers." I doubt that IBM defines a chief programmer as a coder who becomes helpless when given a problem too large to mentally visualize all at once, which is characteristic of Yourdon's

In his next-to-closing statement—his closing statement contained a reading assignment for me—Yourdon states, in regard to his superprogrammers, "numerous studies have shown that they can develop this highly maintainable, highly reliable code 25 times faster than the average slob." How about documenting that statement? I'd like to know how many "numerous" is, how "average slob" was defined, how results were quantified and how the code was proven to be "highly maintainable."

Allen Appel
Systems & Programming Manager
Lerner Shops

I am the Professor Jack Wolfe whose work Dr. Gerald A. Hanweck referred to in your May issue in commenting on Edward Yourdon's references to my work in his article in the February issue (How To Be A Superprogrammer).

Dr. Hanweck conjectured "that the Wolfe tests were nothing more than a test of terminology and had little to do with measuring programming or program design." Obviously, Dr. Hanweck had never seen the test and had never discussed the test with any personnel director who had ever used it as an aid in his selection of programming personnel.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter that I sent to Dr. Hanweck at the Div. of Research and Statistics of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System in Washington, DC.

Dear Dr. Hanweck:

I am the author of the Wolfe test to which you referred in the May issue of INFOSYSTEMS. The test is actually not at all what you conjectured it to be. I believe that you will be interested in knowing that a sampling of the users of our testing service includes the following banks, all of whom have been using the test since 1971 or earlier: Bank of Montreal, Montreal, Canada; Dime Savings Bank of New York, New York; European-American Bank & Trust Co.; Girard Bank; and World Bank.

* The US Central Intelligence Agency and the US Dept. of Agriculture have been using the test since 1968. The Scandinavian Airlines System has been using the test since 1970 to test

The test is used in Europe, Africa and the Far East as well as in the United States, Canada and Mexico. It is of significance that all these knowledgeable organizations were paying for our testing service at a time when the IBM Programming Aptitude Test was available without charge.

Jack Wolfe
Programming Specialists, Inc.
Brooklyn, NY

Folly at the post office

Your Editorial on "The Postal Service—A Disaster Area" (February 1976 issue) is timely and right to the point. Permit me to offer some comments intended to clarify the problem and to suggest a way out of the mess.

During college, I, like so many well-intentioned students, worked part-time at the main post office in the Bronx (New York) during Christmas rush. This was around 1959-60. What I observed was a typical example of government-assisted chaos: archaic methods and procedures, erratic workflow, top-heavy supervisory staff, large-scale goofing off and no accountability for results.

In recent years, the pace and quality of postal service received by the public has grown consistently worse. You don't have to be a management analyst (which I am) to verify this.

Pouring more taxpayers' money into studies "for a period of time sufficient to examine and evolve solutions," as your editorial suggests, would be the height of folly. The "systems talent . . . free from bureaucratic and union pressures" that would be lent to the government, moreover, would never be able to "work the miracles needed to restore sanity" to the system. Can you conceive of any private or public study group coming up with solutions that would in fact be "free from bureaucratic and union pressures?" I can't—not in today's real world. All of those puissant bureaucracies and unions have axes to grind, and empires yet to be built and jobs to protect. Indeed, the government is all too fond of study groups and committees who spend most of their time restudying other groups' studies and other committees' findings. That is a large part of the problem itself. What is not needed is additional appropria-